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Abstract

The effects of performance feedback of success and failure given by partners to 96 subjects of the same or opposite racial groups were measured in terms of subsequent performance on a paired-associate learning task and number of negative and positive adjectives checked for self and partner. Analysis of Variance showed that the procedure yielded a significant interaction between Feedback and Race of S. Blacks were more favorably influenced than Whites by success reports in terms of improvement in performance, increase in positive adjectives for Self and increase in positive adjectives for partner. Failure reports resulted in greater improvement in performance for Blacks and Whites when given by Blacks. Positive self and partner evaluation declined more for Black Ss than for White Ss in a failure condition. All but one of the hypotheses were confirmed.

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Inevitably, individuals will differ in their reactions to criticism by others and in their responses to success and failure. Interpersonal conflicts are likely to ensue when one's beliefs or perceptions of oneself are contradicted or exposed in an opposite light. Interracial conflicts, already widespread, are evident, not only on the larger social scene, but in the academic sphere, as well, and are possibly due to resentment caused by misperceptions of the other group's attitudes and abilities.

Many studies have addressed themselves to child-teacher interactions as a function of race. Research done by Katz, et al (1968) was concerned with the extent to which the race of an adult authority figure influences the minority group child's responsiveness to his evaluations. The authors assume that "young Negro boys tend to regard Negro adults as more predisposed than White adults to like them, evaluate their efforts fairly, and reward them with genuine approval. For the child who holds these attitudes, disapproval from a Negro adult is a signal that greater effort is required, but disapproval from a White adult tends to confirm expectations of failure and rejection." (p. 39) It was, in fact, found that performance was better with Negro testers than with White testers and performance was also better with approval than with disapproval. Negro experimenters were perceived as friendly and fair in their evaluations.

It was also found that individuals differ in their reactions to evaluations of themselves as a result of their initial view of themselves. Findings from a study by Leventhal and Perloe (1962) indicate that subjects high in self-esteem are more readily influenced by optimistic, self-enhancing communications while subjects low in self-esteem showed the opposite effect. Deutsch & Solomon (1959) had female subjects receive either success or failure evaluations of their performance on various tasks by fellow subjects. The subjects' self-concepts were measured both prior to and after experimental manipulations, as well as their evaluation of their own performance and an evaluation of their fellow subjects, who were supposedly unseen partners in the same task. The results obtained showed that subjects responded more favorably to positive rather than negative evaluations from another. Subjects who received negative notes about their performance evaluated the note-writers very unfavorably if the subjects thought well of their own performance, but favorably if they thought they performed poorly and subjects who received positive notes evaluated the note-writers favorably, but more favorably if the subjects thought well of their own performance. Also, the subjects' evaluations of themselves were more favorable if they received notes which were consistent with their own evaluation of their performance.

However, a situation involving performance and evaluation is further complicated when racial factors are included.

A study by Katz, Epps & Axelson (1964) showed that when Negroes were led to believe that their performance was going to be compared with Negro norms, as opposed to White norms, performance achievement was highest in the Negro-norms condition, while the white subjects' scores of the two norms groups, either white or national norms, did not differ. Thus, the extent of the effect on one's self-concept is also partially determined by racial differences which promote apprehensions and misperceptions. A Black may not be able to identify with a white peer's evaluation, while a white student may perceive a Black peer's evaluation as invalid or untrue, as shown by Smith & Dixon (1968) who found that high-prejudiced white subjects depreciate the positive reinforcement received from Negro experimenters, who were considered members of the out-group.

The present study will deal with interracial relations which produce hypothetical interpersonal conflict as a result of reports of success or failure given by members of the same or opposite racial groups. Thus, peer influences on the college level, rather than adult or experimenter effects will be measured. The objective of the present study is to measure a change in performance in terms of an increase in the number of items learned, the change in self-concept as measured by the number of positive and negative adjectives checked as descriptive of Self and the change in attitude toward partners of the same or opposite racial groups, also measured by the number of positive and negative adjectives checked as descriptive of the partners.

These changes will be engendered as a result of negative or positive evaluations of performance reported by peers of the same or opposite racial groups. In light of previous research findings, it is hypothesized that:

1. a report of Failure given by a Black partner to a Black S will improve the performance of the S more so than a report of Failure given by a White partner to a Black S.
2. a report of Failure given by a Black partner to a White S will improve performance of the White S more so than a failure report given to a White S by a White partner.
3. a report of Success given by either a Black or White partner to a Black S will improve performance more so than a report of success given to a White S by a Black or White partner.
4. positive partner evaluation by a Black S will increase with a success report for a Black or White partner more than for a Black or White partner by a White S. With a failure report, positive partner evaluation will decrease more for White partners by Black Ss than for Black partners by White Ss.
5. negative partner evaluation will increase for partners as a result of failure reports given to Black Ss by White partners and to White Ss by Black partners.
6. changes in self-concept will also vary accordingly, with Blacks being more responsive than Whites to success, i.e.,

positive self adjectives will increase for Black Ss as a result of a success report given by either a Black or White partner. With a failure report by a White partner, positive self adjectives will decrease more for Black Ss than for White Ss paired with Black partners.

Method

Subjects: The subjects were 96 female, Hunter College students. Black Subjects were students enrolled in the SEEK program - SEEK stands for Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge and is a five year program within the various senior colleges of CUNY. Students who enter the program are below average high school graduates or those holding equivalency certificates, under 30 years of age and residing in officially designated poverty areas of New York City. The program was designed to overcome their academic deficiences through remedial and basic skills courses. The White subjects were regular admissions, introductory psychology students.

Procedure: A 3x2x2 factorial design was employed. There were three treatment groups: Success, Failure and no Feedback; two racial groups: Black and White and each dyad of Ss consisted of a combination of race; either the same or opposite race partner and S. Dyads were of the same sex. Ss were given the following information:

> "You have volunteered to be part of a survey-type research program which will attempt to determine if the amount of time spent with a person affects the amount of knowledge gained about that person. You will be introduced to a fellow student, with whom you will be given ten minutes to spend, during which time you are free to do whatever will acquaint you with your partner. You will then be asked to check some words which you believe are descriptive of your partner as well as some words which you believe are descriptive of yourself. After this, you will then spend a larger amount of time with your partner doing a simple learning task which will in no way bear on your academic record. The amount of time spent doing this task should increase your degree of acquaintance with your partner."

After the initial 10 minutes had expried, the adjective check lists were distributed, filled in by Ss and then collected. The personality-trait words in the adjective check lists were taken from the ACL by Anderson (1968), in which words were categorized as being Favorable, Unfavorable or Neutral, by psychiatrist judges to be used as a cross-cultural index of personal adjustment. For this study, 10 favorable and 10 unfavorable adjectives were selected.

These selected adjectives were scored for mean likableness according to Anderson (1968). On a 0-6 scale, the 10 positive adjectives all had mean scores of greater than four and the 10 negative adjectives had mean scores of less than two. The means of the pre and post-test adjectives were comparable on likableness.

After the lists were distributed and collected, the learning task was begun. Each of the stimulus words - 10 Nonsense syllables, each having 50% association value (Witmer, 1935) - was presented on a 3x5 card for 10 seconds. The 10 response words, each having AA ratings, i.e., 100 occurrences or over per million words (Thorndike-Lorge) were also

presented for 10 seconds. This was done three times, after which Ss were to write down the correct response word associated with the stimulus word, which was shown. When the learning task began, the stimulus words were not presented in the same order as during the learning trials.

After the task was completed, Partners were instructed by E to inform Ss in the Success condition of the following, regardless of the true outcome:

> "I have scored your paper and according to a list of average scores which was given to me, I see that you have a passing score that is above the average performance score expected. You are doing very well; you are above average, keep up the good work."

Ss in the Failure condtion were informed of the following, regardless of the true outcome:

> "I have scored your paper and according to a list of average scores which was given to me, I see that you have a failing score that is below the average performance score expected. You are not doing very well, you are below average and you should try harder."

After the evaluations were given, Ss were asked to fill out the check lists once again under the pretext that the first questionnaires were the wrong ones and the second set was the correct, revised adjective check lists. Similarly, the task, employing the second paired-associate learning list was performed once again, under the pretext that it was necessary to perform the task once again in order to get a reliability estimate of the results. (Ss did not question this reasoning.)

E then scored the number of words correctly reported and compared this number to the number of words learned in the first task performance. Also, the initial lists were

compared to the second lists by counting the number of positive and negative adjectives checked in each list. All subjects were told the true nature of the experiment at the end and were allowed to express opinions and feelings about the experimental manipulations and results. Subjects were also asked not to reveal the true nature of the experiment to their fellow students and friends.

Results

Analyses of Variance were done on the change scores for performance and for the number of positive and negative adjectives checked for Self and for Partner. In regard to Performance, the results show a main effect of condition on performance, i.e., a Success report yielded the greatest significant increase in performance; a failure report yielded the next greatest increase in performance and the control condition yielded the least amount of increase in performance. ($F=22.12$, df 2, $p < .01$) See Table 1.

Results also show a main effect for Race of Partner, i.e., the greatest amount of increase in performance occurs when partners are Black than when they are White and also it was found that Black Ss tend to do better. (Race of P, $F=10.22$. df 1, $p < .01$; Race of S, $F=14.14$, df 1, $p < .01$). The A x C interaction (Feedback x Race of S; $F=6.74$, df 2, $p < .01$) showed little difference in performance scores in Control condition; Blacks were more responsive to Success than Whites and Whites did not respond particularly to any feedback.

In regard to Positive Self Evaluation, a main effect for condition was found, i.e., a Success report yielded a greater amount of positve self adjectives than did a failure report or no feedback ($F=15.15$, df 2, $p<.01$). Race of S yielded a main effect, i.e., Blacks increased more in the number of positive self adjectives than did Whites. ($F=6.81$, $p<.05$). The A x C interaction (Condition x Race of S) shows that the greatest increase in positive self adjectives was shown in the Success condition by Black Ss more so than by White Ss, ($F=9.68$, df 2, $p<.01$).

In regard to Negative Self Evaluation, a main effect for feedback was found once again. ($F=5.44$, $p<.01$), i.e., Success yielded a greater decrease in the number of negative self adjectives and the A x C interaction ($F=9.11$, $p<.01$) shows that Blacks show a greater decrease in negative self adjectives in the success feedback condition more so than do Whites (who make no changes in the success condition). In the failure condition, Black Ss when paired with a white partner, increase in the number of negative self adjectives and show no change when paired with a Black partner.

For positive partner evaluation, the main effect variables of performance feedback and race of partner were both significant at the .01 level, i.e., a report of success yielded an increase in positive adjectives checked for partners while failure yielded a decrease in positive adjectives for partner. Black partners were rated more positively than White partners by Black Ss and Black Ss showed a greater increase in number of positive words checked for partners when given a success report by either a Black or White partner.

For negative partner evaluation, only in the failure condition did Black Ss increase in the number of negative words checked for White partners, but not for Black partners. ($F=7.32$, df 2, $p < .01$: A x B x C)

Discussion and Implications

Needless to say, relations between Blacks and Whites are plagued by misperceptions and resentments. Through the years, Blacks have felt the intimidations imposed upon them by White affluence and influence. It is the latter of these two intimidations which this study has explored. Perhaps, it seems a matter of common sense to say that people listen to what is said to them; however, unless specifically asked to respond to what has been said, either directly or indirectly, one rarely knows the extent of the effect of what has been communicated. A question which arises in any communication is how vulnerable is the person to the communication?

Blacks, perhaps due to their vulnerable self-image, respond to Success by increasing their positive thinking of themselves, as well as of their partners, who are the sources of this "self-pride". Whereas, Whites, accustomed as they are to success, and possessing a certain stability of self image, find little or no reason to alter their self image as a result of "another successful experience." Similarly, their performance level is less influenced by another's judgment (in general) and the person doing the judging is to a lesser extent "rewarded" for giving the accustomed evaluation by a slight reciprocal increase in

positive partner evaluation.

It is saddening to discover that Blacks will decrease in their positive self image as a result of a failure report by whites. This sounds like the self-fulfilling prophecy of which Kenneth Clark speaks (1965). It is saddening to discover that Blacks will decrease in their positive partner evaluation as a result of a failure report by whites. It can be; however, beautifully instructive and may I add, very wise to utilize the finding that success serves as a reinforcing agent for Blacks, not only as an incentive to achieve, not only as a bolster to their self-images, but as a catalyst for increasing or restoring the positive evaluation of Whites.

It is important; however, not to engage in "token praise"; genuine feelings must support the words and actions. Aside from the global implications, this study has practical applications on a local level. The Black students who served as subjects were members of the SEEK program. Often they have raised the objection of being labell i as SEEK students, apart from the remaining students in the college. With one such concern, what effects does competition among Black and White college students, together in one classroom have on the Black self image and on the achievement level demanded in our society?

A further interesting finding, which also has implications for other educational areas is that negative partner evaulations did not reach significance, except in the failure condition when Blacks were paired with White partners.

Perhaps, there is a general reluctance to negatively rate another person, especially on a one-to-one level. Perhaps, too, in this situation, the subjects perceived the situation as being a student-teacher interaction , one in which negative ratings are toned down. If this latter explanation is the case, this information can be applied to teacher evaluations at the end of the class term. If accurate evaluations are to be obtained, better, more reliable and valid means of obtaining such evaluations should be devised.

As a conclusion to this study and its findings, it seems that individuals' vulnerability to reports about themselves is an important and precarious issue. Given the nature of this issue, properly acting upon the vulnerability of individuals, particularly in Black-White interactions, may serve as a vital answer, or at least a vital link in the chain of racial interactions.

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TABLE 1

Mean Change Scores In Partner & Self Evaluation and Performance & Feedback x Race of S x Race of P Interactions **

Positive Partner Evaluation

Race Ptner	Race Subj	Feedback Suc	Feedback Fail	Feedback Con
W	W	11.75	10.88	10.88
W	B	(12.88)	(8.75)	11.13
B	W	11.75	10.38	11.25
B	B	(12.75)	(11.63)	11.38

A - Performance Feedback
B - Race of P
C - Race of S
A x B x C : F=11.32,df2,<.01

Negative Self-Evaluation

Race Ptner	Race Subj	Feedback Suc	Feedback Fail	Feedback Con
W	W	10.63	10.50	10.88
W	B	10.00	(11.63)	11.13
B	W	10.75	(10.38)	10.88
B	B	10.38	10.88	10.75

A x C: F=9.11,df2,<.01
A x B x C: F=1.07,df2,ns

Negative Partner Evaluation

Race Ptner	Race Subj	Feedback Suc	Feedback Fail	Feedback Con
W	W	11.13	10.63	10.63
W	B	11.13	(11.75)	11.00
B	W	10.88	11.28	10.88
B	B	11.00	10.88	11.00

A x B x C: F=7.32, df2,<.01

Number of Correct Words (Performance)

Race Ptner	Race Subj	Feedback Suc	Feedback Fail	Feedback Con
W	W	11.63	11.63	10.75
W	B	(12.88)	11.88	11.00
B	W	11.50	(12.75)	11.13
B	B	(14.13)	(13.63)	10.88

A x C: F=6.74, df2,<.01
A x B x C: F=1.51, df2,ns

Positive Self-Evaluation

Race Ptner	Race Subj	Feedback Suc	Feedback Fail	Feedback Con
W	W	11.50	10.88	11.00
W	B	(13.00)	(10.00)	11.13
B	W	11.00	11.00	11.38
B	B	(12.88)	11.50	11.25

A x C: F=9.68, df2,<.01
A x B x C: F=1.53, df2,ns

** Means for Change Scores were obtained by scaling the number of adjectives and correct words from -10 to +10, and assigning a whole number from 1 to 21, respectively.